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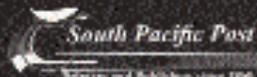
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Arm me - Geno

Ombudsman wants powers to prosecute

THE Ombudsman Commission has to be given powers to prosecute corrupt leaders, its boss Ila Geno says.

Speaking at the Port Moresby Chamber of Commerce and Industry's breakfast meeting at the Holiday Inn hotel on Friday, Mr Geno told the audience of business executives of his frustrations at the commission's inability to charge leaders who breached the Leadership Code.

"Maybe, the laws should be amended to give me criminal powers so that we could lay criminal charges. Being a former police detective, it really hurts my heart to see these things happening," said the former police commissioner who joined the commission as an investigator in 1999.

Mr Geno said the laws could also be amended to enable the commission to file criminal charges. The commission has referred 66 leaders since 1976.

"But there are some technical problems with the law," he said, pointing out that another State institution which took over a certain case had to initiate its own queries as the watchdog did its investigations in confidence.

The biggest hurdle the commission faced in striving to be given prosecution powers is "marketing" the proposed amend-

By ALEX RHEENEY

ments to Parliament. Mr Geno told the breakfast about the commission's futile attempts to get the 1997-2002 Parliament to increase the dismissal-from-office penalty for guilty politicians to 10 years.

"That proposal went to Parliament. They didn't want it, and they didn't want to be dismissed for 10 years or more. So, they stuck with the same three-year dismissal effect," Mr Geno said, adding the country would have to depend on "good leaders" who could vote for the controversial amendments.

But the commission, which gets more than 3000 complaints a year, has limited resources despite asking for K11.5 million a year budget, with diversion of money to fund various Supreme Court references filed by the watchdog questioning the September 2003 vice-regal election fiasco and Parliament's decision to adjourn to June.

"We did not envisage the governor-general's election would be flawed, we did not envisage that Parliament would be adjourned. So, I had to divert resources to addressing what I call 'fundamental governance and leadership issues' and I plucked funds from other areas to address these," he said.



Buka, here we come!

HI: The first 19 police officers of the Australian Federal Police arrived in Port Moresby yesterday on their way to Buka under the Enhanced Co-operation Program between Australia and Papua New Guinea. Sergeant Julie Coles (left) is pictured with part of the 19-man squad at a farewell function in Canberra attended by PNG Internal Security Minister Bire Kimisopa last week. The group is the first of a 210-strong AFP contingent headed to PNG. **Story P5. Picture by GREG KEELE.**

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